

Liam Gillick
Deutscher Pavillon
53. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte
La Biennale di Venezia 2009

Press Release November 2009

Liam Gillick at the German Pavilion – Press Summary

The 53rd Venice Biennale comes to an end on 22nd November 2009, after receiving over 350,000 visitors. The German Pavilion has been at the forefront of media interest and has been the subject of heated debate in the national and international press.

With his allusions to Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's revolutionary Frankfurt Kitchen (1926), Gillick presented an installation that provided a model of democratic and human formation of living space as a counterpart to the absent ergonomic functionality of the pavilion's politically symbolic 1930s architecture. Between these two perspectives on the paradigm of modernism, a connection has been made by a cat - cult icon in antiquity, demon with magic powers in the middle ages, symbol of wisdom in romanticism and domesticated pet today, but still with superstitious connotations - as a speaking witness to history. A self-deprecating alter ego for the artist, the cat stands for this typically formal and enigmatic opposite extreme.

At the outset the main topic of discussion was the choice of Liam Gillick as the artist to exhibit in the German Pavilion. This decision raised the question of national representation, which played a pivotal role in relation to the exhibition. Curator Nicolaus Schafhausen sought to raise precisely this question, as someone who refuses national boundaries in the context of the global art world. **Spiegel online** wrote that in recent decades, the art world has become a great deal more internationalised and it is thus only appropriate that old models of national artistic competition in the Giardini should be called into question. Mr. Schafhausen would like to thank the German Federal Foreign Office who continued to ensure curatorial freedom in the context of the Venice Biennale.

In the German press, **Der Freitag** argued that Gillick's art is interesting in the context of post-minimalism, writing that the work has been made in such a casual way that it appears to represent post-heroic sculpture. Furthermore they remark that the profane contradicts the heroic; instead of consecration, it evokes human necessities.

In the art press, Jörg Heiser, **Frieze** praised Gillick's courage in taking risks with his conscientious negotiation and use of his forms, and for his departure from his previous techniques and materials, culminating in the creation of a unique vantage point. In **Texte zur Kunst**, Tom McDonough talked about a "highly referential work [that] unearths a critical dimension articulated in the monologue of a talking cat," a critical dimension he explored in depth. **Kunstforum International** saw the choice of a foreign artist as a fortunate one, finally someone who is able to approach the pavilion impartially.

In the international press, **nzz-online** talked about "The excellent Briton Liam Gillick" and rightly asked why can there never be any normality in this building from the National Socialist period, and why it steals 'people's breath', as Gillick states. The Canadian **Calgary Herald** judged the exhibition to be "One of the most rigorous and whimsical works of art at the 53rd Venice Biennale." Richard Dorment of the **Daily Telegraph** sums up: "My own highlights include Liam Gillick, the British artist in the German pavilion, showing a sleek, modernistic construction in unpainted plywood that for elegance of design more than stands up to the bone-chilling splendour of the pristine white spaces around it."

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Asked for her general opinion on the principle behind national pavilions in an **arte** documentary, **FAZ** critic Julia Voss (jury member for the Golden Lion) said that national pavilions are a funny concept and a playful formula for an exhibition in which Schaffhausen has chosen not to participate. For him, the national pavilions, and the German Pavilion in particular, are anything but neutral spaces to exhibit art. They are difficult places for artists to come to terms with and work in. In this light, Gillick should be seen as having taken on the challenge and managed to produce an outstanding solution to it. **The Guardian** echoed this point of view by writing that "Its totalitarian architecture is hardly neutral but Gillick has effectively neutralised it with a quasi-kitchen structure of plain wood."

On the 16th December 2009 Gillick will deliver a talk about the scope of his exhibition in the German Pavilion at the x-initiative in New York. Next year, the installation will be exhibited outside of the pavilion context as part of a comprehensive solo exhibition of Gillick's work at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn (April 1 - August 8, 2010).

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